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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Letter dated 7 March 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the Ashgabat Declaration, adopted at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Central Asia and Kazakstan, which was held in Ashgabat from 20 to 22 February 1997 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 110 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Aksoltan AKAEVA
Permanent Representative of
Turkmenistan to the United Nations

* A/52/50.

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ANNEX

The Ashgabat Declaration, adopted at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, organized by the United Nations Children's Fund and Turkmenistan with the assistance of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and held in Ashgabat from 20 to 22 February 1997

Children's rights and priority measures to guarantee them in Central Asia and Kazakstan

We, the representatives of the parliaments of Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, have gathered in Ashgabat to discuss the priority issues of child survival, development and protection in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to define effective and realistic strategies for implementing the Convention in Central Asia and Kazakstan and to adopt joint commitments on measures to ensure that every child in our independent countries has all it needs for a life in dignity and for its development, both today and tomorrow.

We are grateful to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Turkmenistan, which jointly organized this important forum. We note with great satisfaction the participation in the Conference of parliamentarians from a number of States involved in joint projects with UNICEF in Central Asia and Kazakstan and extend to them our sincere thanks for sharing with us their experience in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recognizing the decisive role of parliaments in the noble cause of promoting efforts to ensure the priority and practical impact of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Central Asia and Kazakstan, we have reached a consensus on the following issues:

We accept and approve of the new vision of children expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children should be respected as human beings who have rights and require special care and assistance from the State and society. We recognize and respect the human dignity of every child.

We shall continue to bring up the children of our countries in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. This will guarantee the stable and progressive development of human society.

We appeal to the Presidents of Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to declare 1999 the year of protection of the rights of the child.

Children should occupy a more visible place in social, spiritual, cultural and economic development. We recognize the need for a sound legislative basis and adequate budgetary resources in order to find ways of solving problems related to child survival, development, protection and participation, and to elaborate the mechanisms needed to carry out decisions.

We shall promote cooperation among parliamentarians of our States, the strengthening of ties with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, organs of State power and local self-government, non-governmental and religious organizations and the media, and shall also contribute to the exchange of information on, experience in and approaches to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In order to harmonize our legal systems with a view to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we are in favour of establishing an inter-parliamentary group of interested countries to create and develop a legislative mechanism on the entire range of issues relating to child survival, protection and development. The first meeting of the group will be devoted to micronutrient and iodine deficiencies in children and will be held in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan. A decision on the date of the meeting will be taken at a later time.

At the national level, we shall endeavour to establish a mechanism for coordinating the actions and efforts of State and non-State bodies and organizations involved in implementing and monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We shall work for the further improvement of our national legislations in order to ensure that they reflect to the fullest extent possible the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to establish efficient and economically effective mechanisms for providing social services to children, primarily in the areas of health, water supply and sanitation, education, labour, social security and justice.

We shall encourage the establishment or strengthening of parliamentary committees, commissions and groups dealing with the problems of children in our countries with a view to undertaking a comprehensive review and appraisal of legislation on children and drafting recommendations on its amendment and amplification.

We shall support the development of legislation to improve the nutrition of children and women, in particular through the establishment and effective application of standards for labelling foodstuffs and their enrichment with nutrients (iodization of salt and enrichment of flour with iron), and bearing in mind the requirements of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes.

We stress the importance of conducting further research and drafting practical recommendations to improve the situation of girls and women in the context of national social and economic development in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Particular attention should be given to the education of the girl child, maternal mortality, and pregnancy among teenage girls.

We shall take effective measures to solve the problems of children living in exceptionally difficult conditions and to meet their needs for special care and protection. Child victims of the civil war in Tajikistan, children from the Aral Sea area, Semipalatinsk and other environmentally unsafe regions, children in children's homes and other institutions, children in conflict with the law, working children, children suffering from human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, and homeless children require special attention. Action must be taken at the national and local levels to prevent trafficking in children, their sexual exploitation and their abuse of drugs. Measures should be taken to protect the rights of refugee children, abused children and children deprived of a family environment, as well as the rights of disabled children. Children and families in particularly difficult circumstances should receive the necessary social support and guidance, including material assistance.

Civil society plays an important role in ensuring child survival, development, protection and participation and guaranteeing the quality and availability of social services. We will promote the development of civil society and encourage civilian activities in favour of children, in particular through the adoption of laws and norms that are in keeping with international practice. We recognize the importance of the participation of non-governmental organizations in social development and will promote active cooperation and partnership among non-governmental organizations and State bodies.

We recognize the crucial role of the family in child rearing and development. We shall help create an environment that forms responsible and informed parents, and shall promote the creation of a social structure that supports underprivileged families, encourage diverse forms of guardianship, including the placing of neglected children in other homes. The rights and opportunities of children and families should be expanded by ensuring their access to essential information, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Particular attention should be given to the training of social workers who deal directly with the problems of children and families.

We believe that it is essential to bring the text of the Ashgabat Declaration to the attention of the parliaments of our countries and to encourage the dissemination of the text of the Declaration in the mass media and its publication in national newspapers.